

פרשת קרח

This week's adaptation is dedicated in honor of the graduation of our dear son, Moische, as Salutatorian of his graduating class at Mesivta Ateres Yaakov and in memory of our dear grandfather, R' Mendel Potashnik, a"h (June 26, 1985) לז"נ ר' מנחם מענדל ב"ר דוב בער פוטשניק זצ"ל – נפטר ז' תמוז תשמ"ה תנצב"ה

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־יִצְחָר בֶּן־קֵהָת בֶּן־לֵוִי (טז, א)

“Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi took”

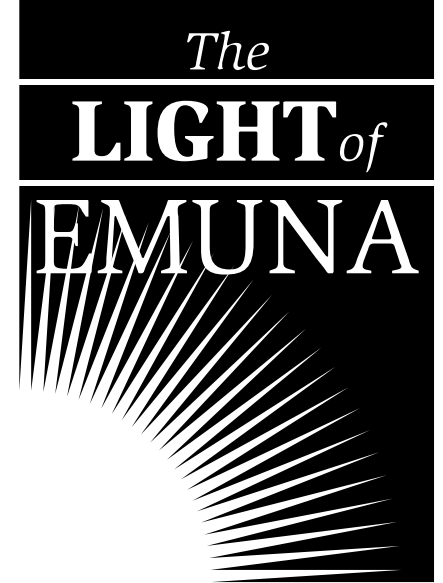
R' Levi taught: “Why did Korach rebel against Moshe? Korach said to himself, ‘I am the son of Yitzhar, the son of oil.¹ Oil floats above whatever liquid it is added to. If those (Moshe and Aharon) who were only anointed with oil took the *kahuna* and royalty for themselves, I, the very son of oil, do I not deserve *kahuna* and royalty all the more?’ With that argument, he rebelled against Moshe.” (*Bamidbar Raba*)

רַב־לֶכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קִדְשִׁים ... מִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ
“You take too much, for the entire (א, טז) congregation is holy ... so why do you raise yourselves above”

A person must flee from disagreements as if from fire. He must cling to the ways of peace. There is nothing more detrimental than controversy. When a dispute burns in the hearts of its participants, they see and hear nothing else.

Divisiveness is the attribute that is more damaging than all others. The punishments for one who embraces discord are frightening. In the heavenly court, punishment is not meted out for those below twenty years of age - yet in Korach's quarrel – even nursing babies born that day were struck. So devastating is animosity that Hashem destroys the very memory of the combatants. The *pasuk* (טז, לה) describes how Hashem destroyed the rebels: “וַיֵּצֵא אֱלֹהִים אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַקֶּהֱלִל” - “A fire came forth from Hashem and consumed the

¹ See the second parsha of Shema – וְתִירוֹשׁ וַיֵּצֵא – ‘and you wine and your oil’



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

two hundred and fifty men who had offered up the incense.” Chazal add that even Korach's name that was written in other people's ledgers was erased, as it says (טז, לג) – “וַתִּכַּס עֲלֵיהֶם הָאֲרֶץ וַיִּאבְדּוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקֶּהֱלִל” – “the earth covered them up, and they were lost to the assembly.” Their names were lost forever, possibly even in the next world.

We must flee the attributes of acrimony and strife and connect ourselves to peace. Rebbe Nachman taught that there are traits of acrimony, discordance and controversy and these traits are born of perspectives that have never been used to serve Hashem. Each person must nullify these characteristics and pursue peace because “Hashem has not found any vessel to contain blessings other than peace.”

We must distance ourselves from controversy in all matters – there should be nothing in the world that we should be willing to engage in disputes over. We cannot even believe anything negative about other Jews, especially *tzaddikim*.

We must believe that every Jew is good - for only Hashem can read thoughts and know motivations – we do not understand or know anything about another person. We must learn to always judge others favorably. We cannot even say that someone hurt us because we cannot be certain that, had the roles been reversed, we wouldn't have done the same thing.

If we reflect, we will discover that our own motivations are not always proper and we often seek disputes to advance some personal agenda or because the negative attribute of pursuing hostility burns inside of us. Rebbe Nachman taught that the trait of spite cannot tolerate the truth. When a person is afflicted with this characteristic, even if he sees the truth with his own eyes, he will thrust it aside.

We must inculcate ourselves with the knowledge that no good ever results from conflict – only evil. There is a Creator of the world and He steers the world, we do not. So why do we allow ourselves to argue and fight so much? “Master of the World, please help me believe that every person’s intentions are certainly good and thereby merit to transform my inclination to acrimony, conflict and strife into one towards peace and harmony.” Chazal have taught us that peace is so great and dissension is so hated. If we increase peace, we will merit becoming close to Hashem, to feel Hashem at every moment.

Do you want Hashem? Don’t be right - be wise. Avoid any trace of conflict, of anger, of hatred and of jealousy. Think good things. Learn to judge all kindly. Seek out the beauty in every Jew. If you truly desire it, you will find it easily.

Korach’s bitter end should serve as a clear warning: run away from all feuds and squabbles, even when we are certain that our motivation is for the sake of Heaven – only grasp the path of peace. Peace is good, peace is blessing. As we ask Hashem three times daily, “establish peace, goodness and blessing ...”

טלית שכולה תכלת, האם חייבת בציצית (רש"י טז, א)
“Does a tallis made entirely of tcheiles require tzitzis.”

Rebbe Nachman taught that of primary importance in *yiddishkeit* is to act with innocence and simplicity - without cleverness.

Korach and his followers thought they were clever. They challenged Moshe Rabbeinu with a *tallis* made entirely of *tcheiles* and asked if it still required *tzitzis*. They asked whether a home filled with *sefarim* still required a *mezuzah*. When Moshe Rabbeinu answered in the affirmative, they mocked him. Korach explained reality according to his own understanding. He was unprepared to accept the words of the truly wise, the true *tzaddik*. He could not accept that the *tzaddik* was smarter than he, more knowledgeable than he. He only accepted reality as he perceived it and that brought about his destruction. Korach’s deficiency, despite being a great man, was his reliance on his own intellect.

A person who acts based solely on his own comprehension has no vitality, no connection.

“A certain *Rosh Hayeshiva* told a story of a certain young man who decided to accept the stringency of being very diligent with *birchas hamazon* - to don his hat and jacket and say it with patience from within a *siddur*. A classmate, the class clown, started to mock him, “a great *tzaddik* has come to our *yeshiva*, a righteous, pious, humble man, how nice ...” The jester broke the young man’s spirit by doing so in front of tens of other students who burst out laughing. The young man was devastated, lost his motivation, shortly thereafter abandoned the *yeshiva* and his learning and became a source of stress to his parents and his family. The offender also paid a steep price. How sad and painful it is that righteousness and aspirations for greatness became the subject of jest. Rather than encourage a friend, rather than cultivate a healthy envy for his friend’s conduct, he shed his blood. Even if the young man’s actions were merely external and had not been internalized, he should have been encouraged. The Chovos Halevovos teaches that the heart is drawn after actions. Even if one’s heart is incomplete and not yet worthy of lofty deeds, there is no doubt that the repetition of positive actions will straighten the crooked heart and elevate him until his deeds and his heart sing the song of Hashem and His *mitzvos*, in complete harmony.

Why should we ridicule a pure young man who listens to Chazal and seeks to be great? What are worthier aspirations: to be some punk; to be rude; to flip through newspapers all day; to be a real estate magnate; to own a restaurant; to be a journalist? By rights, we should venerate and praise one who aims higher. We should not allow derision and disdain, with sharp tongues and denigration, dissuade those who want more - to the point of their reverting to swallowing their *bentching*, finishing *shemona esrei* in seconds and burying their heads in newspapers.

Rabbeinu Yonah refers to those who shame Jews who yearn for greatness and aspire to elevate themselves as, "haters of Hashem." The mockers find it inconvenient that there are those who love their Creator and strive to make Him happy. If they too truly loved Hashem, even if they did not have similar aspirations, they would make their lives' work the fortifying, encouraging and supporting of those few that do strive to increase Hashem's honor with their behavior.

Those who are derisive are simply jealous and, in the depths of their souls, they recognize their deficiency as compared to others. To hide their own wretchedness, rather than burying themselves, they bury those with ambition.

Blessed is he whose righteousness, common sense and innocent, pure heart lead him on the true and proper path to correct not only himself, but all of us - primarily if we view him with a good eye and a good heart." (*Harav Yaakov (Kuby) Levi*)

The name Korach comes from the words for ice and baldness - קרח and קרחת - indicating places of no growth. Trees and shrubs grow around them, but they remain barren. They stand still, make no progress, and have no liveliness, no connection. They do not feel the spirit of Hashem that warms, fertilizes, causes growth and gives strength to progress and ascend, to continue. This is a most difficult blockage.

The basis of Korach's claims regarding the *tallis* made entirely of *tcheiles* - why does it need

tzitzis, why does it need more strings - is the greatest heresy that can exist. His point of origin was believing that he could reach some perfection and that this perfection gave him the ability to sleep peacefully - he had fulfilled his purpose, everything was beautiful, everything in his life was excellent, everything in his life was okay and no one could tell him what to do. Moreover, he believed that he understood, he knew, he could lead, he could help people. He saw many unfortunate people that had not learned, that did not know things, that were materialistic, whereas, he was a Levi, he was a tremendous scholar and a genius, he was already perfect ... He sought to freeze the Jewish people, he would not allow for the possibility of correcting anything, introspection, inspiration and seeking for what else could be done.

This attitude is so prevalent in our world. We believe: we are okay, we have accomplished, we are safe, we are established - our table is set, our learning is okay, our mode of dress is okay, our children's schools are okay - everything is fine - הכל בסדר.

Yet, there are people who do not view everything as okay - they see that there are failures and shortcomings - they see themselves as lacking. These people are in a place of growth because if things aren't perfect, there is much work to do - then there is progress, then there is hope, then there is connection to Hashem - then there is room for *tefilla*, then there is room for tears. (*Beor Pnei Melech Chaim*)

וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָיו (דברים כח ט)

"and walk in His ways"

Korach's arguments seem defensible. We are the way Hashem created us. We are self-centered. The capital "I" escorts us from the birth to death.

Chazal explain a baby's clenched fists at birth as a declaration, "the world is mine and I will inherit it." And so we behave our entire lives.

Hand someone a group picture and the first thing

he does is look for himself. Only after he finds himself does he look at the rest of the picture.

By nature, we believe that we are owed everything. When someone else has something or receives honor, we feel as if he stole it from us – it would be more appropriately awarded me. That is why giving is so difficult – “not only will the other person have it, but I will be giving it up.” Even when we understand how important it is to give, we still try not to give up too much and we tend to give less significant portions away.

We are inherently selfish. Hashem instilled it in us so that we work on it and transform it for good. There is a positive element to our selfish perspectives. The Midrash (Tehillim 37) says that without jealousy, the world would not exist. The Gemara (Bava Basra 21.) teaches that jealousy among scholars increases wisdom. Moreover, every one of us is supposed to say that the world was created for us to acknowledge our own worth and obligation to do Hashem’s will. That being said, we must not become self-absorbed.

Love of fellow Jews is mandatory. The Chidushei Harim explains that Hillel taught that the whole

Torah to the non-Jew with the words, “do not do unto others what you yourself despise” rather than the Torah’s words, “love your fellow as yourself” because the most that a non-Jew can comprehend is to not do evil to others. The concept of being obligated to love someone else as you love yourself is impossible for them to understand.

Yet, it is expected of us. Not merely to love another Jew but to do good to him and to do so for his sake. Our Merciful Father, Who conducts His world with kindness and compassion, commands us to follow in His ways. Just as He is gracious and merciful to all creatures, so must we be compassionate with each other. The root of the souls of the Jewish people is carved from the source of kindness and compassion. The Jewish people are charitable. The mercy and the helping hand of one Jew to another have always been noteworthy. We are required to add to what Hashem instilled in our nature. We cannot merely do good; we must do good for the sake of Heaven. We do because Hashem commanded us to, but it should be for His honor, for the sake of Heaven, for His name, with love.

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me to not be moved by any person, only by You.

When someone tries to scare me, or even threaten me, help me remember that no one can harm me without Your permission, Father. And if something painful nevertheless happens to me, help me remember, Father, that everything is from You and for my own good. When someone humiliates me, especially in front of others, help me, Father, not to respond - to remain quiet. To remember how many gifts are earned via silence - silence of the mouth and silence of the heart.

When I ask someone for something and he barely acknowledges me and makes me feel like a nuisance or passes me without so much as a nod, as if I am invisible, help me, Father, to give him the benefit of the doubt. Who knows what he is going through at the moment and who knows how I would act in his situation. Even if he truly does not like me, help me remember that You, Father, do like me.

Help me, Father, to learn to let go, to remain calm, to remain silent, and to remember that my real honor is in what I do for Your honor and not dependent on whether others smile at me. Help me pray for everyone and to ask, on their behalf, for all the good in the world, for I have seen how much it helps and how it can transform an enemy into a friend. Help me constantly judge others favorably, draw a new picture in which there are no guilty parties, all are meritorious.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

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Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and is not a complete or exact translation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

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